

Against the Grain

Volume 29 | Issue 4

Article 53

September 2017

Book Reviews-Monographic Musings

Regina Gong

Lansing Community College Library, gongr1@lcc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gong, Regina (2017) "Book Reviews-Monographic Musings," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 29: Iss. 4, Article 53.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7827>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.



Column Editor's Note: Summer has come and gone and a new school year is upon us once again. I hope this start of the academic year brings new opportunities for all of us to engage with our colleagues and the people we serve. I'm back to reviewing books again after a brief hiatus due to work commitments. What better way to get back to writing reviews than this book **"The Heart of Librarianship: Attentive, Positive, and Purposeful Change."** This book really inspired me to look into ways that I can be more effective in advocating and embracing change. While change may sometimes evoke fear and uncertainty, we all should welcome this as an opportunity to improve and challenge the way we do things.

There's a number of interesting books reviewed in this column as well so I hope it piques your interest and maybe prompts you to order one for your library or for yourself.

If you like to read and write about what you've read, contact me at <gongr1@lcc.edu> and I may have just the right book for you. Until next time and happy reading! — RG

Stephens, Michael. *The Heart of Librarianship: Attentive, Positive, and Purposeful Change.* Chicago, IL: ALA Editions, 2016. 9780838914540. 176 pages. \$48.

Reviewed by **Regina Gong** (OER Project Manager/Head of Technical Services & Systems, Lansing Community College Library) <gongr1@lcc.edu>

Let me start by saying that I really like this book. For me it is both timely as it is relevant. It speaks to how librarians can affect the change we want to happen both within our profession and beyond. It takes the lens of empathy as a mirror to look into the issues we are passionate about and advocate for in our work as librarians and educators.

This book is a curated collection of articles from **Michael Stephens'** "Office Hours" column in the *Library Journal*. **Stephens** is Assistant Professor in the School of Information at **San Jose State University**. He is instrumental in designing and teaching the online postgraduate course, *The Hyperlinked Library*, which focuses on the powerful emerging trends, tools and processes driving change in library and information communities. A prolific writer and author of numerous publications, he also maintains a long-running blog "*Tame the Web*" (<https://tametheweb.com/>) that serves a platform for LIS practitioners and students to engage in participatory learning. **Stephens** is also a frequent keynote speaker who has travelled the world speaking about emerging technology, trends, and how library schools can make LIS curriculum more relevant and in tune to current needs of students as well as changing user expectations. The book unmistakably highlights the author's perspectives and exposure to trends happening outside of the U.S. that makes for an interesting and eye-opening read.

Clocking in at just 142 pages, this book is a quick read. The chapters are presented as stories and conversations based on an overarching theme of connection and connectedness. It opens with a discussion of what it means to be a "hyperlinked librarian." **Stephens** characterizes a hyperlinked librarian as someone who believes that the "library is everywhere — it is not just the building or virtual spaces." By having this mindset, it reinforces the importance of reaching out to all users and not just those who come into the building, (p. 2). Hyperlinking also challenges existing organizational structures and supports organizations that are flatter and more team-based rather than the traditional hierarchical model. This chapter also talks about dealing with changes in our organizations and handling chaos and roadblocks that come our way when implementing the new and unfamiliar. One that gives me pause is the way **Stephens** talks about the proverbial complaint of librarians of not having the time to learn or keep up with what's new or what's trending in our field. While we all wear many hats and are stretched

beyond our limits, I tend to agree with him when he mentions that, "I don't have the time" is sometimes just an excuse to sidestep learning something new or going beyond our comfort zones. Maybe the mindset we need to have when confronted with yet another technology to learn or new initiative to get involved with is "what do we make time for?" Also in this chapter is **Stephens'** discussion on engaging in reflective practice. This means taking the time to reflect on our accomplishments, failures, and decisions as well as our practices and how we might improve it to better serve everyone. The author further mentions that while we practice introspection, we should not forget to be visible, to be present, and engaged with the people we serve.

Not surprisingly, there are chapters that speak of the author as a LIS professor and his thoughts on remaking and improving the library school curriculum so that it reflects current practices. He is big on learning and teaching in the open by way of writing in public spaces such as blogs or wikis. Because he is hyperlinked, **Stephens** encourages social media participation among his students (Twitter, Facebook, Goodreads, and other social sites) as a way of building personal learning networks and increasing connections to people outside of the profession.

This book, while based on a column written over a course of a few years, is surprisingly not dated. What he writes four years ago still resonates today. Reading this book brings a sense of hope, inspiration, and excitement for what the future holds and for the new generation of hyperlinked librarians entering our profession. After all, the heart of librarianship are the people that provide its lifeblood.

Soehner, Catherine and Darling, Ann. *Effective Difficult Conversations: A Step-by-Step Guide.* Chicago, IL: ALA Editions, 2017. 9780838914953. 128 pages. \$38.00.

Reviewed by **Ashley Fast Bailey** (Director, Collection Development and Workflow Solutions, Central U.S., GOBI Library Solutions) <abaily@ybp.com>

We've all been there. At some point in our career we will have to sit down and have a difficult conversation. Whether that talk is with a colleague, a direct report, or an administrator, there will come a time when an issue needs to be addressed in order to keep a healthy work environment. **Catherine Soehner**, Associate Dean for Research and User Services at the **University of Utah**, and **Ann Darling**, the Assistant Vice President of Undergraduate Studies also at **University of Utah**, draw on their extensive knowledge about having these difficult conversations and provide practical ways to navigate these choppy waters. By drawing on their research, past experiences, and knowledge they outline ways to have these conversations in *Effective Difficult Conversations: A Step-by-Step Guide*.

Soehner and Darling are clear from the introduction that this is not meant to be a self-help book, but rather a guidebook in providing ways in which to prepare, conduct, and follow up from hard conversations. Beginning by defining what a difficult conversation is, they outline the components of what constitutes this type of communication. Each person might view a difficult conversation a little bit differently due to their own communication skills or level of comfort with certain types of conversations. Through examples, **Soehner and Darling** give some illustrations on what a difficult conversation might be.

As with any difficult conversation, one must prepare ahead of time to make it most effective. **Soehner and Darling** refer to this process as "getting clear." By preparing one's self to have this type of conversation and doing some self-reflection ahead of time, it ensures that the talk is approached in the best manner possible. Before one has this conversation, **Soehner and Darling** suggest gathering resources. By having documentation for the conversation or consulting with others,

continued on page 31

Book Reviews

from page 30

the conversation can stay objective and to the facts. It allows you to keep the messaging of that difficult conversation focused on the primary message. Tempers and personalities can derail or hinder these types of conversations and by keeping to the message of the talk, it is more likely to be effective.

Soehner and **Darling** spend some time in their work focusing directly on the conversation and break it down into six parts. During the conversation, the person conducting the talk can use their six steps to have an effective dialogue and work towards the desired outcome. Within these six steps (stating the facts, asking, listening, engaging to understand, paying attention, and exploring options) the authors give great practical advice and real-life examples on how to approach certain situations. They also provide many great nuggets of wording and thought to help think through the conversation and how it might go.

Once one initiates this type of conversation, it doesn't stop when it's over. Just as with the preparation that **Soehner** and **Darling** write about, there is also follow up. Difficult conversations should be written up and followed up on. Both the person conducting the conversation and the person on the receiving end need to have action items to ensure the problem or issue is resolved or closure is achieved. Writing up the conversation after the fact is one way of doing this. The authors also give examples based on their sample conversations throughout the work.

The last few chapters of the book focus on the various groups that conversations might occur between: co-workers, management, and administration. Each chapter provides various scenarios and outcomes of difficult conversations — how they were prepared for, talked through, and the follow up.

Effective Difficult Conversations empowers librarians to feel confident in having hard conversations in the work place. No one is exempted from having these hard talks. **Soehner** and **Darling** provide practical and effective ways in confidently broaching these conversations. The step-by-step processes outlined in this work are very practical and easy to understand with real world implications.

Breeding, Marshall, ed. *Library Technology Buying Strategies*. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2016. 978083891467. 136 pages. \$55.00.

Reviewed by **Dao Rong Gong** (Systems Librarian, Michigan State University Libraries) <gongd@msu.edu>

During the past decade, developments in library technology have grown quite remarkably from the traditional system we have become accustomed to. With the library system industry repositioning itself to take on the challenges of providing new service models, continuing technology innovations, as well as expanding business acquisitions and reorganization, it is imperative for libraries to look for new strategies when acquiring library systems. There are already a number of books out there on library technology (for example *Selecting and Implementing an Integrated Library System* by **Richard Jost**, 2015) so this book is not unique in that regard. However, what stands out is that it is edited and written by **Marshall Breeding**, a prominent name in the field of library technology. **Breeding** has written a large number of publications about the paradigm shift in library systems — from mainframe era, to client/server systems and on to the current web-based platforms. It's interesting to see the author's take on this topic because of his extensive experience and perspective on the evolution of library technology. The book discusses a broad range of technological concepts with discussion points organized by what **Breeding** regards as most important in library system acquisition. It covers topics such as request for proposals (RFP), resource sharing, cloud computing, library service platforms and acquiring eBook platforms.

Most of the time, we do not normally read about inter-library loan (ILL) in the context of library technology advancement but this book provides a much needed discussion on this topic with two chapters

focusing on resource sharing. From a system perspective, the author touches on various shared systems commonly implemented, serving various types of libraries. In terms of resource sharing services, the author provides a good discussion on consortia and collaborative service models. It also further highlights ILL interoperability standards, and shows how to best navigate through the many elements of systems that handle inter-institutional lending and borrowing.

There is a chapter that deals with different types of library systems and computational architectures behind those products, which is based on author's previously published article. In this chapter, **Breeding** made distinctions between the term "Integrated Library System" and the "Library Service Platform," a term he proposed in 2011. He argues that the line can be drawn in the context of evolving technology and demands to the library system. He presents a collection of broadly defined system characteristics that describes the functional and technical structure of library systems. By coupling (or decoupling) the characteristics in the library services context, **Breeding** was able to categorize library systems into "integrated library system," "progressive integrated library system" and "library services platform." This offers a unique perspective that allows a better global view of the otherwise complex library technology ecosystem.

The two chapters about RFP by **Nikki Waller**, managing editor for ALA TechSource is by far the most practical among all the other chapters. For many organizations, RFP is a standard procedure that cannot be avoided when purchasing library systems and **Waller** does a good job in walking the reader through a step-by-step RFP process and providing detailed information on what a RFP is all about. Her tips (some are from the very vendors at the RFP receiving end) are casual and helpful. She even warns about restraining from the temptation of copying and pasting RFP boilerplate straight from the Internet "because vendors have seen the boilerplate, and bid writers can respond to it in their sleep" (page 19).

There is no one-size-fits-all answer for selecting a library system. However, understanding how library systems work and what constitutes a strategy in choosing library products is a good way to approach this all too overwhelming process. *Library Technology Buying Strategies* is maybe a good starting point for all libraries thinking of making small or big-ticket technology purchases.

Moniz, Richard, Joe Eshleman, Jo Henry, Howard Slutzsky and Lisa Moniz. *The Mindful Librarian: Connecting the Practice of Mindfulness to Librarianship*. Waltham, MA: Chandos Publishing, 2016. 9780081005552. 238 pages. \$78.95.

Reviewed by **Margaret M. Kain** (Reference Librarian for Education, University of Alabama at Birmingham Libraries) <pkain@uab.edu>

The Mindful Librarian at first glance may seem like an unusual topic for librarians, however, authors **Moniz (R.)**, **Eshleman, Henry**, **Slutzsky** and **Moniz (L.)** take readers on an enlightening journey into the practice of mindfulness. These distinguished authors, consisting of four library professionals plus a practicing psychologist who is also a psychology professor, demonstrate how the user experience may vary depending on how mindful the librarian is during the interaction. **Moniz (R.)**, et al., use real library practice examples to show how teaching and interacting experiences may be enhanced for both librarians and library users.

Providing a how-to conversation with useful tips, authors explore mind based stress reduction or MBSR techniques. Outlining how mindfulness helps reduce stress, detailing how science provides evidence of the value of mindful practice in daily life. The authors **Moniz (R.)**, et al., stress that while the practice of mindfulness has a beneficial impact when addressing the needs of library users, their focus is on librarians themselves, noting that materials generally written on mindfulness emphasize readers should "begin with themselves" (p. xviii).

The authors start with a general introduction that provides background information about mindfulness and how it is a valuable tool

continued on page 32

Book Reviews

from page 31

to add to the librarian's toolbox. Split into eight chapters, readers are given the information needed to incorporate mindfulness into their daily practice. Each chapter addresses various applications of how mindfulness will enhance or change the conversation and interaction between librarians and library users. Chapter one begins with a discussion on how the partnership of librarians with mindfulness is a natural fit, detailing how and why mindfulness is important and exploring it not just as a theoretical concept but also noting evidence that is scientifically valuable to reducing stress and improving health.

The next chapter explores the connection to education; the relationship between mindfulness to teaching and learning at all grade levels may be seen. Librarians are teachers by nature and profession; including mindfulness techniques into daily life enhances the teaching experience for both the librarian and the student. Student research and writing is the focus of the next chapter. Authors explore the anxiety students face when doing research for the first time at the academic level, observing how students facing their first research project may be overwhelmed and not able to communicate adequately their research needs. The librarian who is mindful will be able to ascertain more readily the student's research needs, eliminating their stress and the librarian's frustration.

Chapter four is an important one for the academic community. It provides the connection between mindfulness and the **ACRL** framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education and explains how librarians can use mindfulness to enhance information literacy teaching efforts. Next, authors explore mindfulness and the impact it has on the typical reference desk interactions. Providing guidance in using mindfulness to meet the **ALA Reference & User Services Association's (RUSA)** guidelines. In conjunction with teaching, readers learn how through thoughtful and mindful interactions they can build or develop relationships with faculty in other departments on campus. In chapter seven, the importance of mindfulness for librarians in library management and library leadership is examined. The final chapter focuses on the solo librarian, as many librarians in school systems are alone, demonstrating how mindful techniques can help reduce stress and providing ideas for how to develop professional relationships.

The Mindful Librarian provides readers with valuable information on how using mindfulness will enhance professional and personal life experiences. Librarians in all environments will learn how being in the present when teaching, speaking with, or generally interacting with library users will affect whether or not the user's information needs are met. Providing food for thought, it is recommended reading for all librarians.

Allan, Barbara. *Emerging Strategies for Supporting Student Learning: A Practical Guide for Librarians and Educators.*

London: Facet Publishing, 2016. 9781783300709.
178 pages. \$75.00.

Reviewed by **Corey Seeman** (Director, Kresge Library Services,
Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)
<cseeman@umich.edu>

Academic librarians have been experiencing a seismic shift in the work that they do on campus with students and other community members. As we have seen a tremendous rise in the sophistication and self-reliant nature of our students and faculty, many academic librarians have shifted their focus from a service model to one focused on being an educator. For these professionals, the vision of information literacy as a central role in the successful graduate has changed the value proposition of the library.

This book brings different visions of the library: one that focuses on service and how we can support student learning by getting them more quickly to the information they require, and another that guides them away from projects where the information is simply not available. Through this lens, a librarian would strive to provide a strong user service ethos to help track down the resources that the student needs so they can

assess and analyze that information for their more subject or discipline approach to learning. To use the colloquialism, this would be providing the student the fish versus teaching them how to fish.

This might be the biggest conundrum facing librarians at this point in time — do we teach or do we serve? Does the library promote information literacy (among other literacies) as a pillar in its own right among the skills that a student is expected to leave school with? Or is the role of the library to support their understanding of their chosen path of discipline? Seems to be a librarian version of the Hatfields and McCoys.

Author **Barbara Allan** is a trainer who has worked in libraries and business schools where she has focused on the student experience and enhanced learning. She has written extensively on libraries over the years, especially with regard to training and student learning. The focus of this work is the librarian as an educator and focuses on ways that academic libraries develop training and curriculum opportunities to engage with students on issues of information literacy. She provides many examples throughout this work and mini-case studies that provide a roadmap for professionals wishing to pursue a deeper dive into these particular examples. These case studies provide quick overviews of information literacy activities in libraries across the world. It is, in many ways, a finger on the pulse of teaching in libraries with directions on how to dig deeper. **Allan** immerses people quickly into the various literacies and pedagogies used by academic librarians to engage with students on campus. If your view is librarian as service, then the book's value is less clear.

To illustrate this, we can look at chapter four on employability, a topic that many of us in higher education are concerned about as a critical outcome of one's degree. The focus on the chapter is the ability for students to showcase their information literacy skills to potential employers as an attribute. While that may certainly be the case, one of the general themes going against this argument is that many employers (from our experience at my business school) do not see information literacy (or any related aspects) as a particular skill. The notion that "looking it up" is something that we can all do on our phones and at anytime from anywhere has removed the value of that skill. Of course, that is not true — but who is keeping score? From my perspective, I envision this chapter as a way that the library can help the students with their job search, but it was not the case. Then again, my operation is focused on the library as service provider so it is not perfectly in sync.

Having said this, I still find value in this work, especially for librarians who put their role as an educator over their role as a service. For those who promote service, the book is less useful. While I might not need a copy of this on my personal or library bookshelf, I would hope that it would be available in my shared resources network. 🌳

Rumors

from page 24

at **George Washington University** and in a number of collection development roles at **Harvard University's Widener Library**. She earned her doctorate in American and New England studies at **Boston University**, master's degrees in library science and in religion from the **University of Chicago** and a bachelor's degree in English literature from **Whitman College**.

I remember the **Hyde Park Debate** at the **2016 Charleston Conference** between **Alison Scott** and **Michael Levine-Clark** on the topic **Resolved: APC-Funded Open Access is Antithetical to the Values of Librarianship**. In Favor: **Alison Scott** and Opposed: **Michael Levine-Clark**. The debate was conducted in general accordance with **Oxford Union rules**. All in the audience voted their opinion on the resolution before the debate began using text message voting, and the vote totals were recorded. Each speaker offered a formal opening statement, followed by a response to each other's statements, and then the floor was open for discussion. At the conclusion of the debate, another vote was taken. The winner of the debate was the one who caused the most

continued on page 40